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Panther Sports News

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY, Charleston, IL 61920

DAVID KIDWELL, *Sports Information Director*

OFFICE: (217) 581-2920

HOME: (217) 345-4166

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (August 1, 1986)

CHARLESTON, IL.--Quarterback Sean Payton's continued assault on the record book, almost the entire offensive unit back and the first ever night football game at O'Brien Stadium will be the focus of early attention as Eastern Illinois University's football Panthers open preseason camp Thursday (August 7).

Coach Al Molde will welcome rookies and transfers for three days of orientation prior to the lettermen and returning squad members reporting on Sunday evening, August 10.

Following Monday's (August 11) testing and media session, double days will begin on Tuesday (August 12) for the full squad as it prepares for EIU's earliest opener ever, a 6:30 p.m. kickoff, Saturday, August 30 at Illinois State.

Eastern will open its home season under newly installed lights at 6:30 Saturday, Sept. 6 hosting Northeast Missouri.

"We're ready to go," says fourth year coach Al Molde who has kept alive EIU's record of eight straight winning seasons. "We felt coming out of spring practice that we were much closer to being where we'd like to be in regard to depth and quality."

The passing game returns in full force as the record setting, two-time All-American duo of Sean Payton (Naperville-Central) throwing to Roy Banks (Detroit, MI-King) returns for one more time.

Payton, sitting on 7199 yards, is just 2801 short of becoming the fifth collegiate QB to pass for 10,000 yards. He holds 14 EIU passing and total offense records.

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Molde says, simply, if the offense is to do well it's "because Sean is our offensive leader. He's stayed down here all summer, lifted weights and thrown every day in preparation for the season."

Banks is chasing two EIU career pass catching records. He has 2163 yards and needs 360 to topple Jerry Wright's 2522 mark. His 131 receptions is just 34 from besting Willie White's 164.

A third All-American, slotback Calvin Pierce (Oak Lawn Robbins), had the most receiving yardage last year with 60 catches for 900 yards. However halfback DuWayne Pitts (Detroit, MI-MacKenzie) caught the most with 65. He finished with 1426 all-purpose yards.

While the passing game will still be dominant, Molde does say, "we're going to implement the running game more than in the past. . . particularly where ball control is in our best interest. People can look for Pierce to run the ball on occasion."

Molde pointed to All-Gateway safety Bob Bronaugh (Rantoul) and inside linebacker Bill Cochrane (Lake Zurich) to "be the defensive leaders on the field. Cochrane is a key. He had a good spring and we're depending on his leadership and overall play.

"We're also looking forward to the addition of several Jucos and the abilities they bring with them. But it's a big if . . .if they come in and if they live up to expectations. If not, we're not that bad off because we have starters or first backups returning at most positions."

California JCs just arriving who Molde mentioned include RB Uasi Latu (Thousand Oaks-Moorpark CC), WR William English (Pasadena-Pasadena CC), DL Ike Freeman (Long Beach-Long Beach CC), DB Robert Jackson (Spring Valley-Southwest CC), DB John Vanderstaay (Anaheim-Fullerton CC), Steve Tillotson (El Cajon-Grossmount CC) and K Richard Ehmke (El Cajon-Grossmount CC).